

Chapter 3

Perception, Attribution, and Judgment of Others

Learning Objectives

After reading Chapter 3, you should be able to:

1. Define *perception* and discuss some of the general factors that influence perception.
2. Explain Bruner's model of the perceptual process and describe the main biases in person perception.
3. Describe how people form *attributions* about the causes of behaviour.
4. Discuss various biases in attribution.
5. Discuss the concepts of *workforce diversity* and valuing diversity.
6. Discuss how racial, ethnic, gender, and age *stereotypes* affect organizational behaviour and what organizations can do to manage diversity.
7. Define *trust* perceptions and *perceived organizational support* and discuss how organizations can foster positive perceptions of trust and support.
8. Discuss how perception and perceptual biases affect the outcomes of selection interviews and performance appraisals and describe some techniques to improve the accuracy of them.

Bank of Montreal

In 1991, Bank of Montreal (BMO) executives discovered an alarming statistic. Although women made up 75 percent of the company's workforce, only 9 percent were in executive positions, and 13 percent were in senior management positions. Overall, 91 percent of the company's women employees were in nonmanagement positions. CEO Tony Comper described the bank's performance in achieving equality for women as "dismal."

In order to address this problem, the executives created a Task Force on the Advancement of Women to identify and break down the barriers to women's advancement and to develop an action plan. Members of the task force interviewed almost 300 employees and conducted the company's largest employee survey ever, with more than 9,000 responses.

Based on the results, the task force identified three major barriers to women's advancement. First, it was found that many employees in the company had false assumptions about women. In fact, a key finding was that women were not advancing because of stereotypical attitudes, myths, and "conventional wisdom." For example, women at the bank were perceived as either too young or too old to compete with men for promotions. They were seen as less committed to their careers because they have babies and leave the bank while their children are young. It was believed that more women needed to be better educated to compete in significant numbers with men and that women don't have the "the right stuff" to compete for more senior jobs. Second, the task force discovered that the bank had failed to provide



The Bank of Montreal has received many awards for its Workplace Equality Programs since 1990 when CEO Tony Comper made a commitment to give all employees equal opportunity to reach their career potential. Today, the BMO is a model for how to tie workplace diversity to business success.

women with the encouragement, opportunities, and the information they needed to advance in their careers. Third, the bank had been unsupportive of employees' personal and family commitments, something that most severely affected women with children.

In order to remove these barriers, a number of actions were taken. To dispel the myths and faulty stereotypes about the bank's women employees, a document that contained the bank's workforce statistics was distributed to employees. With regard to age, the statistics showed that the age distribution of men and women in the bank was nearly equivalent. In response to the myth that women quit the company after having children, the statistics showed that women at all levels except senior management had longer overall service records than men. Regarding the myth that women are not educated enough to take top positions in the bank, the statistics showed that at nonmanagement and junior-management levels, more women had degrees than men. And in response to the myth that women don't have "the right stuff," the statistics indicated that a larger percentage of women than men at all levels received top performance ratings. Thus, contrary to the myths and stereotypes, the bank's women employees were just as qualified for advancement as men in every respect.

In addition to removing the stereotypes of the bank's women employees, the action plan also included enhanced training, better posting of job vacancies, redesigned career development opportunities, job information counsellors to help employees determine their suitability for particular positions, and more flexible work arrangements. A monitoring system was also set up to ensure that the bank would examine the rate of women's advancement on a regular basis. Within two years, there were substantial gains in the percentages of women at all management levels, and by 1997, 23 percent of executives were women, up from 7.5 percent in 1991.

The women's equality initiatives led to an overhaul of the entire diversity system at the bank. Within 13 months of the women's task force, the bank created task forces on the hiring

Bank of Montreal
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and advancement of aboriginal people, people with disabilities, and members of visible minorities. Once again, it was found that a major barrier involved misperceptions and myths. For example, the task force found that there existed a perception that persons with disabilities were less productive, took more sick leave, and were not qualified. The task force dealt with these misperceptions with information and action plans. For example, managers received training to increase their understanding of applicants with disabilities.

Action plans to improve the hiring and advancement of aboriginal people, people with disabilities, and members of visible minorities included targeted recruitment materials, career guidance, a mentoring program, employee networks, diversity courses and action teams, advisory councils that involve employees in promoting equality, student-employment programs and internships, and partnerships with community groups.

In addition, the bank's managers are required to set goals and action plans for the hiring, development, and promotion of women, aboriginal people, persons with disabilities, and visible minority members as part of the annual business plan process, and they are held accountable for achieving these goals in their annual performance review. Managers who promote equality receive monetary and emotional recognition.

Today, an executive committee oversees equity and diversity issues in the bank, and over the last five years the number of female executives has risen to more than 34 percent. The bank wants to reach gender parity by 2007. In addition, minorities now make up 19.1 percent of the bank's workforce, compared to 12.5 percent in the early 1990s. Not surprisingly, the BMO has received many awards for its Workplace Equality Programs and is now considered a model for how to tie diversity to business success. [1]

Why has the Bank of Montreal made workplace equality and diversity a top business priority? What effect do equality and diversity programs have on employee attitudes and behaviour? And why do organizations often harbor false assumptions and myths about women employees? These are the kinds of questions that we will attempt to answer in this chapter. First, we will define perception and examine how various aspects of the perceiver, the object or person being perceived, and the situation influence perception. Following this, we will present a model of the perceptual process, and we will consider some of the perceptual tendencies that we employ in forming impressions of people and attributing causes to their behaviour. Finally, we will examine the role of perception in achieving a diverse workforce, perceptions of trust and organizational support, selection interviewing, and performance appraisal. In general, you will learn that perception and attribution influence who gets into organizations, how they are treated as members, and how they interpret this treatment.

What Is Perception?

Perception. The process of interpreting the messages of our senses to provide order and meaning to the environment.

Perception is the process of interpreting the messages of our senses to provide order and meaning to the environment. Perception helps sort out and organize the com-



"I'm only firing you to impress the people that I'm not firing."

plex and varied input received by our senses of sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing. The key word in this definition is *interpreting*. People frequently base their actions on the interpretation of reality that their perceptual system provides, rather than on reality itself. If you perceive your pay to be very low, you might seek employment in another firm. The reality—that you are the best-paid person in your department—will not matter if you are unaware of the fact. However, to go a step further, you might be aware that you are the best-paid person and *still* perceive your pay as low in comparison with that of the CEO of the Bank of Montreal or your ostentatious next-door neighbour.

Some of the most important perceptions that influence organizational behaviour are the perceptions that organizational members have of each other. Because of this, we will concentrate on person perception in this chapter.

Components of Perception

Perception has three components—a perceiver, a target that is being perceived, and some situational context in which the perception is occurring. Each of these components influences the perceiver's impression or interpretation of the target (Exhibit 3.1).

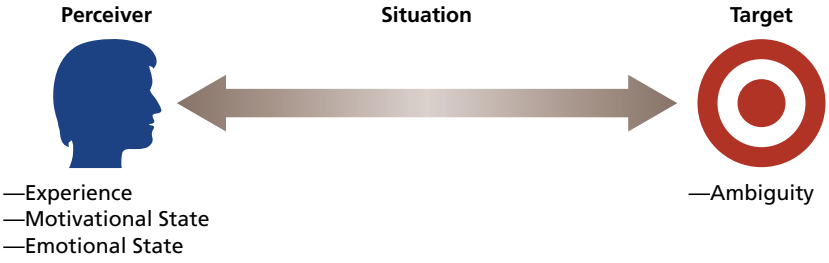
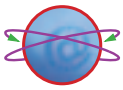


Exhibit 3.1
Factors that influence perception.

The Perceiver

The perceiver's experience, needs, and emotions can affect his or her perceptions of a target.

One of the most important characteristics of the perceiver that influences his or her impressions of a target is experience. Past experiences lead the perceiver to develop expectations, and these expectations affect current perceptions. An interesting example of the influence of experience on perception is shown in Exhibit 3.2. It illustrates the perceptions of 268 managerial personnel in a Fortune 500 company concerning the influence of race and gender on promotion opportunities. As you can see, Caucasian men were much less likely to perceive race or gender barriers to promotion than were Caucasian women, non-Caucasian men, and non-Caucasian women.[2] Remember, these people were ostensibly viewing the same "objective" promotion system.



Fortune 500
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Frequently, our needs unconsciously influence our perceptions by causing us to perceive what we wish to perceive. Research has demonstrated that perceivers who have been deprived of food will tend to "see" more edible things in ambiguous pictures than will well-fed observers. Similarly, lonely university students might misperceive the most innocent actions of members of the opposite sex as indicating interest in them.

Emotions, such as anger, happiness, or fear, can influence our perceptions. We have all had the experience of misperceiving the innocent comment of a friend or acquaintance when we were angry. For example, a worker who is upset about not getting a promotion might perceive the consolation provided by a co-worker as gloating condescension. On the other hand, consider the worker who does get a promotion. He is so happy that he fails to notice how upset his co-worker is because she was not the one promoted.

In some cases, our perceptual system serves to defend us against unpleasant emotions. This phenomenon is **perceptual defence**. We have all experienced cases in which we "see what we want to see" or "hear what we want to hear." In many of these instances, our perceptual system is working to ensure that we do not see or hear things that are threatening.

Perceptual defence. The tendency for the perceptual system to defend the perceiver against unpleasant emotions.

The Target

Perception involves interpretation and the addition of meaning to the target, and ambiguous targets are especially susceptible to interpretation and addition. Perceivers have a need to resolve such ambiguities. You might be tempted to believe that providing more information about the target will necessarily improve perceptual accuracy. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Writing clearer memos might not always get the message across. Similarly, assigning minority workers to a prejudiced manager will not always improve his or her perceptions of their true abilities. As we shall see shortly, the perceiver does not or cannot always use all the information provided by the target. In these cases, a reduction in ambiguity might not be accompanied by greater accuracy.

Exhibit 3.2
Ratings of the perceived importance of race and gender for promotion opportunity in executive jobs.

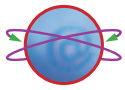
	Caucasian Men (N = 123)	Caucasian Women (N = 76)	Non-Caucasian Men (N = 52)	Non-Caucasian Women (N = 17)
Race	26	62	75	76
Gender	31	87	71	82

Note: Table values are the percentages saying that race or gender was important or very important. N = number of cases. Source: Cox, T., Jr. (1993). *Cultural diversity in organizations: Theory, research, & practice*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, p. 119.

The Situation

Every instance of perception occurs in some situational context, and this context can affect what one perceives. The most important effect that the situation can have is to add information about the target. Imagine a casual critical comment about your performance from your boss the week before she is to decide whether or not you will be promoted. You will likely perceive this comment very differently from how you would if you were not up for promotion. Also, a worker might perceive a racial joke overheard on the job very differently before and after racial strife has occurred in the plant. In both of these examples, the perceiver and the target are the same, but the perception of the target changes with the situation.

A Model of the Perceptual Process



Jerome Bruner and Theory
www.gwu.edu/~tip/bruner.html

Exactly how does the perceiver go about putting together the information contained in the target and the situation to form a picture of the target? Respected psychologist Jerome Bruner has developed a model of the perceptual process that can provide a useful framework for this discussion.[3] According to Bruner, when the perceiver encounters an unfamiliar target, the perceiver is very open to the informational cues contained in the target and the situation surrounding it. In this unfamiliar state, the perceiver really needs information on which to base perceptions of the target and will actively seek out cues to resolve this ambiguity. Gradually, the perceiver encounters some familiar cues (note the role of the perceiver's experience here) that enable her to make a crude categorization of the target. At this point, the cue search becomes less open and more selective. The perceiver begins to search out cues that confirm the categorization of the target. As this categorization becomes stronger, the perceiver actively ignores or even distorts cues that violate initial perceptions. (See the left side of Exhibit 3.3.) This does not mean that an early categorization cannot be changed. It does mean, however, that it will take a good many contradictory cues before one recategorizes the target, and that these cues will have to overcome the expectations that have been developed.

Let us clarify your understanding of Bruner's perceptual model with an example, shown on the right side of Exhibit 3.3. Imagine that a woman who works as an engineer for a large aircraft company is trying to size up a newly hired co-worker. Since he is an unfamiliar target, she will probably be especially open to any cues that

Model	Example
Unfamiliar target encountered	New co-worker
↓ Openness to target cues	↓ Observation; search for information
↓ Familiar cues encountered	↓ Co-worker is Stanford graduate with good grades
↓ Target categorized	↓ Co-worker is "good man" with "great potential"
↓ Cue selectivity	↓ Co-worker's poor performance ignored or distorted
↓ Categorization strengthened	↓ Co-worker is still "good man" with "great potential"

Exhibit 3.3
Bruner's model of the perceptual process and an example.

might provide information about him. In the course of her cue search, she discovers that he has a Master's degree in aeronautical engineering from Stanford University, and that he graduated with top grades. These are familiar cues because she knows that Stanford is a top school in the field, and she has worked with many excellent Stanford graduates. She then proceeds to categorize her new co-worker as a "good man" with "great potential." With these perceptions, she takes a special interest in observing his performance, which is good for several months. This increases the strength of her initial categorization. Gradually, however, the engineer's performance deteriorates for some reason, and his work becomes less and less satisfactory. This is clear to everyone except the other engineer, who continues to see him as adequate and excuses his most obvious errors as stemming from external factors beyond his control.

Bruner's model demonstrates three important characteristics of the perceptual process. First, perception is *selective*. Perceivers do not use all the available cues, and those they use are thus given special emphasis. This means that our perception is efficient, and this efficiency can both aid and hinder our perceptual accuracy. Second, Bruner's model illustrates that our perceptual system works to paint a constant picture of the target. Perceptual *constancy* refers to the tendency for the target to be perceived in the same way over time or across situations. We have all had the experience of "getting off on the wrong foot" with a teacher or a boss and finding it difficult to change their constant perception of us. Third, the perceptual system also creates a consistent picture of the target. Perceptual *consistency* refers to the tendency to select, ignore, and distort cues in such a manner that they fit together to form a homogeneous image of the target. We strive for consistency in our perception of people. We do not tend to see the same person as both good and bad or dependable and untrustworthy. Often, we distort cues that are discrepant with our general image of a person to make the cues consistent with this image.

To test your understanding of Bruner's model, refer back to the example in Exhibit 3.3 and explain the role of selectivity, constancy, and consistency. In the next section, we consider some specific perceptual biases that contribute to selectivity, constancy, and consistency in our perception of people.

Basic Biases in Person Perception

For accuracy's sake, it would be convenient if we could encounter others under laboratory conditions, in a vacuum or a test tube, as it were. Because the real world lacks such ideal conditions, the impressions that we form of others are susceptible to a number of perceptual biases.

Primacy and Recency Effects

Given the examples of person perception that we have discussed thus far, you might gather that we form our impressions of others fairly quickly. One reason for this fast impression formation is our tendency to rely on the cues that we encounter early in a relationship. This reliance on early cues or first impressions is known as the **primacy effect**. Primacy often has a lasting impact. Thus, the worker who can favourably impress his or her boss in the first days on the job is in an advantageous position due to primacy. Similarly, the labour negotiator who comes across as "tough" on the first day of contract talks might find this image difficult to shake as the talks continue. Primacy is a form of selectivity, and its lasting effects illustrate the operation of constancy. Sometimes, a **recency effect** occurs in which people give undue weight to the cues they encountered most recently. In other words, last impressions count most. Landing a big contract today might be perceived as excusing a whole year's bad sales performance.

Primacy effect. The tendency for a perceiver to rely on early cues or first impressions.

Recency effect. The tendency for a perceiver to rely on recent cues or last impressions.

Reliance on Central Traits

Even though perceivers tend to rely on early information when developing their perceptions, these early cues do not receive equal weight. People tend to organize their perceptions around **central traits**, personal characteristics of the target that are of special interest to them. In developing her perceptions of her new co-worker, the experienced engineer seemed to organize her impressions around the trait of intellectual capacity. The centrality of traits depends on the perceiver's interests and the situation. Thus, not all engineers would organize their perceptions of the new worker around his intellectual abilities, and the established engineer might not use this trait as a central factor in forming impressions of the people she meets at a party.

Central traits. Personal characteristics of a target person that are of particular interest to a perceiver.

Central traits often have a very powerful influence on our perceptions of others. Physical appearance is a common central trait in work settings that is related to a variety of job-related outcomes. Research shows an overwhelming tendency for those who are "attractive" to also be perceived as "good," especially when it comes to judgments about their social competence, qualifications, and potential job success.[4] In general, research shows that conventionally attractive people are more

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Attractiveness Pays Off, But It Pays Off Better for Men

Consistent with evidence that physical attractiveness is related to obtaining employment and promotion, more attractive employees also have been found to enjoy more economic success in their careers. A recent study looked at the careers of 2,500 law students from a prestigious law school in the United States. An independent panel of raters rated the students' appearance on a scale from one to five. Five years after graduation, those of above-average attractiveness were earning eight to nine percent more than those of below-average attractiveness. After 15 years, those of above-average appearance were earning 12 to 13 percent more.

The research on attractiveness and salaries also suggests that attractiveness is more consistently related to economic success for men than for women. Roszell, Kennedy, and Grabb (1989) examined the relationship of attractiveness to income attainment for over 1,000 Canadians. Attractive persons earned higher annual salaries than less attractive persons. With each increase in rated attractiveness on a five-point scale of attractiveness, the 1981 annual income of the respondent increased by $1,988. After controlling for respondent gender, the gender composition of the job, and 1979 salary, this figure dropped to $1,046 but was still statistically significant. This relationship was found for men, older employees, and those engaged in male-dominated occupations, but not for women, younger employees, and those in female-dominated occupations.

Two studies at the University of Pittsburgh have provided further evidence that good looks pay. In one study, Good, Olson, and Frieze (1986) used height, weight, and body mass (weight relative to height) as indicators of physical attractiveness. They surveyed over 2,000 M.B.A. graduates of the University of Pittsburgh who graduated between 1973 and 1982. For men, weight but not height was found to predict starting salary, and both height and weight predicted the current (1983) salary. However, neither of these variables predicted the starting and current salary of the women in the sample. For each one-inch increase in height, the salary of the men was $600 higher. Overweight men earned $4,000 less in salary than those of normal weight.

In another study, Frieze, Olson, and Russell (1991) asked a group of people with corporate management experience to rate the physical attractiveness of 700 M.B.A. graduates on a five-point scale. The starting salaries of male graduates receiving the highest attractiveness rating were approximately $5,000 a year more than those receiving the lowest attractiveness rating. After five years, those receiving the highest rating earned $10,000 more than those receiving the lowest rating. Attractiveness had no impact on starting salaries of women but was related to later salaries, although not as strongly as for men. For each increment in attractiveness on the five-point scale, women earned $2,000 more in salary five years later.

Source: Excerpted from Stone, E. F., Stone D. L., &. Dipboye, R. L. (1992). Stigmas in organizations: Race, handicaps, and physical unattractiveness. In: K. Kelley (Ed.), *Issues, theory, and research in industrial/organizational psychology*. New York: Elsevier, 419–420; McFarland, J. (1996, January 23). The ugly truth: Looks count. *The Globe and Mail*, p. B12.

likely than unattractive people to be hired, given good performance evaluations, and promoted.[5] More attractive people are also more likely to be paid more, as discussed in "Research Focus: *Attractiveness Pays Off, But It Pays Off Better for Men.*"

Implicit Personality Theories

Implicit personality theories. Personal theories that people have about which personality characteristics go together.

Each of us has an implicit personal "theory" about which personality characteristics go together. These are called **implicit personality theories**. Perhaps you expect hardworking people to also be honest. Perhaps you feel that people of average intelligence tend to be most friendly. To the extent that such implicit theories are inaccurate, they provide a basis for misunderstanding.[6] The employee who assumes that her very formal boss is also insensitive might be reluctant to discuss a work-related problem with him that could be solved fairly easily.

Projection

Projection. The tendency for perceivers to attribute their own thoughts and feelings to others.

In the absence of information to the contrary, and sometimes in spite of it, people often assume that others are like themselves. This tendency to attribute one's own thoughts and feelings to others is called **projection**. In some cases, projection is an efficient and sensible perceptual strategy. After all, people with similar backgrounds or interests often *do* think and feel similarly. Thus, it is not unreasonable for a capitalistic businessperson to assume that other businesspeople favour the free enterprise system and disapprove of government intervention in this system. However, projection can also lead to perceptual difficulties. The chairperson who feels that an issue has been resolved and perceives committee members to feel the same way might be very surprised when a vote is taken. The honest warehouse manager who perceives others as honest might find stock disappearing. In the case of threatening or undesirable characteristics, projection can serve as a form of perceptual defence. The dishonest worker might say, "Sure I steal from the company, but so does everyone else." Such perceptions can be used to justify the perceiver's thievery.

Stereotyping

Stereotyping. The tendency to generalize about people in a social category and ignore variations among them.

One way to form a consistent impression of other people is simply to assume that they have certain characteristics by virtue of some category that they fall into. This perceptual tendency is known as **stereotyping**, or the tendency to generalize about people in a social category and ignore variations among them. Categories on which people might base a stereotype include race, age, gender, ethnic background, social class, occupation, and so on.[7] There are three specific aspects to stereotyping.[8]

- We distinguish some category of people (college professors).
- We assume that the individuals in this category have certain traits (absent-minded, disorganized, ivory-tower mentality).
- We perceive that everyone in this category possesses these traits ("All my professors this year will be absent-minded, disorganized, and have an ivory-tower mentality.")

People can evoke stereotypes with incredibly little information. In a "first impressions" study, the mere designation of a woman as preferring to be addressed as Ms. led to her being perceived as more masculine, more achievement oriented, and less likeable than those who preferred the traditional titles Miss or Mrs.[9]

Not all stereotypes are unfavourable. You probably hold favourable stereotypes of the social categories of which you are a member, such as student. However, these stereotypes are often less well developed and less rigid than others you hold.

Stereotypes help us develop impressions of ambiguous targets, and we are usually pretty familiar with the people in our own groups. In addition, this contact helps us appreciate individual differences among group members, and such differences work against the development of stereotypes.

Language can be easily twisted to turn neutral or even favourable information into a basis for unfavourable stereotypes. For example, if British people do tend to be reserved, it is fairly easy to interpret this reserve as snobbishness. Similarly, if women who achieve executive positions have had to be assertive, it is easy to interpret this assertiveness as pushiness.

Knowing a person's occupation or field of study, we often make assumptions about his or her behaviour and personality. Accountants might be stereotyped as compulsive, precise, and one-dimensional, while engineers might be perceived as cold and calculating. Reflect on your own stereotypes of psychology or business students.

On the average, not all stereotypes are inaccurate. You probably hold fairly correct stereotypes about the educational level of the typical college professor and the on-the-job demeanour of the typical telephone operator. These accurate stereotypes ease the task of developing perceptions of others. However, it is probably safe to say that most stereotypes are inaccurate, especially when we use them to develop perceptions of specific individuals. This follows from the fact that stereotypes are most likely to develop when we do not have good information about a particular group.

This raises an interesting question: If many stereotypes are inaccurate, why do they persist?[10] After all, reliance on inaccurate information to develop our perceptions would seem to be punishing in the long run. In fact, a couple of factors work to *reinforce* inaccurate stereotypes. For one thing, even incorrect stereotypes help us process information about others quickly and efficiently. Sometimes, it is easier for the perceiver to rely on an inaccurate stereotype than it is to discover the true nature of the target. The male manager who is required to recommend one of his 20 employees for a promotion might find it easier to automatically rule out promoting a woman than to carefully evaluate all his employees, regardless of gender. Second, inaccurate stereotypes are often reinforced by selective perception and the selective application of language that was discussed above. The Hispanic worker who stereotypes all non-Hispanic managers as unfair might be on the lookout for behaviours to confirm these stereotypes and fail to notice examples of fair and friendly treatment. If such treatment *is* noticed, it might be perceived as patronizing rather than helpful.

Later, we will cover gender, age, racial, and ethnic stereotypes at work. For now, consider You Be the Manager on the next page.

Attribution: Perceiving Causes and Motives

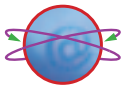
Thus far, we have considered a general model of perception and discussed some specific perceptual tendencies that operate as we form impressions of others. We will now consider a further aspect of impression formation—how we perceive people's motives. **Attribution** is the process by which we assign causes or motives to explain people's behaviour. The attribution process is important because many rewards and punishments in organizations are based on judgments about what really caused a target person to behave in a certain way.

Attribution. The process by which causes or motives are assigned to explain people's behaviour.

In making attributions about behaviour, an important goal is to determine whether the behaviour is caused by dispositional or situational factors. **Dispositional attributions** suggest that some personality or intellectual characteristic unique to the person is responsible for the behaviour, and that the behaviour thus reflects the "true person." If we explain a behaviour as a function of intelligence, greed, friendliness, or laziness, we are making dispositional attributions. In general, the business press attributed the turnaround of the Chrysler Corporation to Lee Iacocca's leadership skills and market savvy, not to government loan guarantees or an improving economy.

Dispositional attributions. Explanations for behaviour based on an actor's personality or intellect.





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Situational attributions.
Explanations for behaviour based on an actor's external situation or environment.

Situational attributions suggest that the external situation or environment in which the target person exists was responsible for the behaviour, and that the person might have had little control over the behaviour. If we explain behaviour as a function of bad weather, good luck, proper tools, or poor advice, we are making situational attributions.

Obviously, it would be nice to be able to read minds in order to understand people's motives. Since we cannot do this, we are forced to rely on external cues and make inferences from these cues. Research indicates that as we gain experience with the behaviour of a target person, three implicit questions guide our decisions as to whether we should attribute the behaviour to dispositional or situational causes.[11]

- Does the person engage in the behaviour regularly and consistently? (Consistency cues)



Unusual behaviours provide us with more information about a person's motives than do conforming behaviours.

- Do most people engage in the behaviour, or is it unique to this person? (Consensus cues)
- Does the person engage in the behaviour in many situations, or is it distinctive to one situation? (Distinctiveness cues)

Let us examine consistency, consensus, and distinctiveness cues in more detail.

Consistency Cues

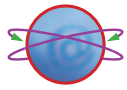
Consistency cues reflect how consistently a person engages in some behaviour over time. For example, unless we see clear evidence of external constraints that force a behaviour to occur, we tend to perceive behaviour that a person performs regularly as indicative of his or her true motives. In other words, high consistency leads to dispositional attributions. Thus, one might assume that the professor who has generous office hours and is always there for consultation really cares about his students. Similarly, we are likely to make dispositional attributions about workers who are consistently good or poor performers, perhaps perceiving the former as "dedicated" and the latter as "lazy." When behaviour occurs inconsistently, we begin to consider situational attributions. For example, if a person's performance cycles between mediocre and excellent, we might look to variations in workload to explain the cycles.

Consistency cues. Attribution cues that reflect how consistently a person engages in some behaviour over time.

Consensus Cues

Consensus cues reflect how a person's behaviour compares to that of others. In general, acts that deviate from social expectations provide us with more information about the actor's motives than conforming behaviours do. Thus, unusual, low-consensus behaviour leads to more dispositional attributions than typical, high-consensus behaviour. The person who acts differently from the majority is seen as revealing more of his or her true motives. The informational effects of low-consensus behaviour are magnified when the actor is expected to suffer negative consequences because of the deviance. Consider the job applicant who makes favourable statements about the role of big business in society while being interviewed for a job at General Motors. Such statements are so predictable in this situation that the inter-

Consensus cues. Attribution cues that reflect how a person's behaviour compares with that of others.



General Motors
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viewer can place little confidence in what they really indicate about the candidate's true feelings and motives. On the other hand, imagine an applicant who makes critical comments about big business in the same situation. Such comments are hardly expected and could clearly lead to rejection. In this case, the interviewer would be more confident about the applicant's true disposition regarding big business.

A corollary to this suggests that we place more emphasis on people's private actions than their public actions when assessing their motives.[12] When our actions are not open to public scrutiny, we are more likely to act out our genuine motives and feelings. Thus, we place more emphasis on a co-worker's private statements about his boss than we do on his public relations with the boss.

Distinctiveness Cues

Distinctiveness cues. Attribution cues that reflect the extent to which a person engages in some behaviour across a variety of situations.

Distinctiveness cues reflect the extent to which a person engages in some behaviour across a variety of situations. When a behaviour occurs across a variety of situations, it lacks distinctiveness, and the observer is prone to provide a dispositional attribution about its cause. We reason that the behaviour reflects a person's true motives if it "stands up" in a variety of environments. Thus, the professor who has generous office hours, stays after class to talk to students, and attends student functions is seen as truly student oriented. The worker whose performance was good in his first job as well as several subsequent jobs is perceived as having real ability. When a behaviour is highly distinctive, in that it occurs in only one situation, we are likely to assume that some aspect of the situation caused the behaviour. If the only student-oriented behaviour that we observe is generous office hours, we assume that they are dictated by department policy. If a worker performed well on only one job, back in 1985, we suspect that his uncle owns the company!

Attribution in Action

Frequently, observers of real life behaviour have information at hand about consistency, consensus, and distinctiveness. Let us take an example that shows how the observer puts such information together in forming attributions. At the same time, the example will serve to review the previous discussion. Imagine that Smith, Jones, and Kelley are employees who work in separate firms. Each is absent from work today, and a manager must develop an attribution about the cause in order to decide which personnel action is warranted.

- *Smith*—Smith is absent a lot, his co-workers are seldom absent, and he was absent a lot in his previous job.
- *Jones*—Jones is absent a lot, her co-workers are also absent a lot, but she was almost never absent in her previous job.
- *Kelley*—Kelley is seldom absent, his co-workers are seldom absent, and he was seldom absent in his previous job.

Just what kind of attributions are managers likely to make regarding the absences of Smith, Jones, and Kelley? Smith's absence is highly consistent, it is a low-consensus behaviour, and it is not distinctive, since he was absent in his previous job. As shown in Exhibit 3.4, this combination of cues is very likely to prompt a dispositional explanation, perhaps that Smith is lazy or irresponsible. Jones is also absent consistently, but it is high-consensus behaviour, in that her peers also exhibit absence. In addition, the behaviour is highly distinctive—she is absent only on this job. As indicated, this combination of cues will usually result in a situational attribution, perhaps that working conditions are terrible, or that the boss is nasty. Finally, Kelley's absence is inconsistent. In addition, it is similar to that of co-workers and not distinctive, in that he was inconsistently absent on his previous job as well. As shown, this combination of cues suggests that some temporary, short-

	Consistency	Consensus	Distinctiveness	Likely Attribution
Smith	High	Low	Low	Disposition
Jones	High	High	High	Situation
Kelley	Low	High	Low	Temporary Situation

Exhibit 3.4
Cue combinations and resulting attributions.

term situational factor causes his absence. It is possible that a sick child occasionally requires him to stay home.

Biases in Attribution

As the preceding section indicates, observers often operate in a rational, logical manner in forming attributions about behaviour. The various cue combinations and the resulting attributions have a sensible appearance. This does not mean that such attributions are always correct, but that they do represent good bets about why some behaviour occurred. Having made this observation, it would be naive to assume that attributions are always free from bias or error. Earlier, we discussed a number of very basic perceptual biases, and it stands to reason that the complex task of attribution would also be open to bias. Let us consider the fundamental attribution error, actor–observer effect, and self-serving bias.[13]

Fundamental Attribution Error.

Suppose you make a mistake in attributing a cause to someone else's behaviour. Would you be likely to err on the side of a dispositional cause or a situational cause? Substantial evidence indicates that when we make judgments about the behaviour of people other than ourselves, we tend to overemphasize dispositional explanations at the expense of situational explanations. This is called the **fundamental attribution error.**[14]

Fundamental attribution error. The tendency to overemphasize dispositional explanations for behaviour at the expense of situational explanations.

Why does the fundamental attribution error occur? For one thing, we often discount the strong effects that social roles can have on behaviour. We might see bankers as truly conservative people because we ignore the fact that their occupational role and their employer dictate that they act conservatively. Second, many people whom we observe are seen in rather constrained, constant situations (at work, or at school) that reduce our appreciation of how their behaviour can vary in other situations. Thus, we fail to realize that the observed behaviour is distinctive to a particular situation. That conservative banker might actually be a weekend skydiver!

The fundamental attribution error can lead to problems for the managers of poorly performing employees. It suggests that dispositional explanations for the poor performance will sometimes be made even when situational factors are the true cause. Laziness or low aptitude might be cited, while poor training or a bad sales territory are ignored. However, this is less likely when the manager has had actual experience in performing the employee's job and is thus aware of situational roadblocks to good performance.[15]

Actor–Observer Effect.

It is not surprising that actors and observers often view the causes for the actor's behaviour very differently. This difference in attributional perspectives is called the **actor–observer effect.**[16] Specifically, while the observer might be busy committing the fundamental attribution error, the actor might be emphasizing the role of the situation in explaining his or her own behaviour. Thus, as actors, we are often particularly sensitive to those environmental events that led us to be late or absent. As observers of the same behaviour in others, we are more likely to invoke dispositional causes.

Actor–observer effect. The propensity for actors and observers to view the causes of the actor's behaviour differently.

We see some of the most striking examples of this effect in cases of illegal behaviour, such as price fixing and the bribery of government officials. The perpetrators

and those close to them often cite stiff competition or management pressure as causes of their ethical lapses. Observers see the perpetrators as immoral or unintelligent.[17]

Why are actors prone to attribute much of their own behaviour to situational causes? First, they might be more aware than observers of the constraints and advantages that the environment offered. At the same time, they are aware of their private thoughts, feelings, and intentions regarding the behaviour, all of which might be unknown to the observer. Thus, I might know that I sincerely wanted to get to the meeting on time, that I left home extra early, and that the accident that delayed me was truly unusual. My boss might be unaware of all of this information and figure that I am unreliable.

Self-Serving Bias. It has probably already occurred to you that certain forms of attributions have the capacity to make us feel good or bad about ourselves. In fact, people have a tendency to take credit and responsibility for successful outcomes of their behaviour and to deny credit and responsibility for failures.[18] This tendency is called **self-serving bias**, and it is interesting because it suggests that people will explain the very same behaviour differently on the basis of events that happened *after* the behaviour occurred. If the vice-president of marketing champions a product that turns out to be a sales success, she might attribute this to her retailing savvy. If the very same marketing process leads to failure, she might attribute this to the poor performance of the marketing research firm that she used. Notice that the self-serving bias can overcome the tendency for actors to attribute their behaviour to situational factors. In this example, the vice-president invokes a dispositional explanation ("I'm an intelligent, competent person") when the behaviour is successful.

Self-serving bias. The tendency to take credit for successful outcomes and to deny responsibility for failures.

Self-serving bias can reflect intentional self-promotion or excuse making. However, again, it is possible that it reflects unique information on the part of the actor. Especially when behaviour has negative consequences, the actor might scan the environment and find situational causes for the failure.[19]

To review the basics of attribution, people often use consistency, consensus, and distinctiveness cues in a sensible and rational manner when trying to explain some observed behaviour. However, the fundamental attribution error suggests that observers are often overly ready to invoke dispositional explanations for the behaviour of actors. The actor–observer effect suggests that the actor is more ready to attribute his or her own behaviour to situational factors. Given the self-serving bias, this is especially likely if the behaviour is unsuccessful.

Person Perception and Workforce Diversity

The realities of workforce diversity have become an important factor for many organizations in recent years. **Workforce diversity** refers to differences among employees or potential recruits in characteristics, such as gender, race, age, religion, cultural background, physical ability, and sexual orientation. The interest in diversity stems from at least two broad facts. First, the North American workforce is becoming more diverse. Second, there is growing recognition that many organizations have not successfully managed workforce diversity.

Workforce diversity. Differences among recruits and employees in characteristics, such as gender, race, age, religion, cultural background, physical ability, and sexual orientation.

The Changing Workplace

As we mentioned in Chapter 1, the composition of the North American labour force is changing.[20] Thirty years ago, it was mainly Caucasian and mainly male. Now, changing immigration patterns, the ageing of baby boomers, and the increasing movement of women into paid employment make for a lot more variety. People of Asian and Hispanic background have become a growing segment of the labour pool. Immigrants from all parts of the world to Canada are making the Canadian popu-

lation and labour force increasingly multicultural/multiethnic. Not only is the labour pool changing, but many organizations are seeking to recruit more representatively from this pool so that they employ people who reflect their customer base—to better mirror their markets. This is especially true in the growing service sector, where contact between organizational members and customers is very direct. As discussed in the chapter opening vignette, the Bank of Montreal has been very active in developing programs to hire, develop, and promote visible minorities, women, aboriginal people, and disabled persons.

The changing employment pool is not the only factor that has prompted interest in diversity issues. Globalization, mergers, and strategic alliances mean that many employees are required to interact with people from substantially different national or corporate cultures. Compounding all this is an increased emphasis on teamwork as a means of job design and quality enhancement. How can a diverse group of individuals work well together?

Valuing Diversity

In the past, organizations were thought to be doing the right thing if they merely tolerated diversity—that is, if they engaged in fair hiring and employment practices with respect to women and minorities. Firms were considered to be doing especially well if they assisted these people to "fit into" the mainstream corporate culture by "fixing" what was different about them.[21] For example, women managers were sometimes given assertiveness training to enable them to be as hard-nosed and aggressive as their male counterparts!

Recently, some have argued that organizations should *value* diversity, not just tolerate it or try to blend everyone into a narrow mainstream. To be sure, a critical motive is the basic fairness of valuing diversity. However, there is increasing awareness that diversity and its proper management can yield strategic and competitive advantages. These advantages include the potential for improved problem solving and creativity when diverse perspectives are brought to bear on an organizational problem, such as product or service quality. They also include improved recruiting and marketing when the firm's human resources profile matches that of the labour pool and customer base (see Exhibit 3.5). The results of a recent study indicate that more organizations are adopting diversity as part of their corporate strategy in order to improve their competitiveness in global markets. Another study found that organizations with more gender-diverse management teams have superior financial performance.[22]

At IBM, diversity is embedded in the overall strategy, business goals, and policies toward employees and the company is now regarded as a leader in workplace diversity. At IBM Canada, 26 percent of those in senior leadership positions are held by women, and one-third of employees are women[23] The Bank of Montreal also believes that building a diverse workforce that reflects the communities and individuals it serves and giving all employees equal opportunities to reach their career goals is its greatest competitive advantage.

Stereotypes and Workforce Diversity

If there is a single concept that serves as a barrier to valuing diversity, it is the stereotype. Let us examine several workplace stereotypes and their consequences. Common workplace stereotypes are based on gender, age, race, and ethnicity.

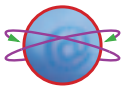
Racial and Ethnic Stereotypes. Racial and ethnic stereotypes are pervasive, persistent, frequently negative, and often self-contradictory. Most of us hold at least some stereotypical views of other races or cultures. Over the years, such stereotypes exhibit remarkable stability unless some major event, such as a war, intervenes to change them. Then, former allies can acquire negative attributes in short order.

Exhibit 3.5
Competitive advantages to valuing and managing a diverse workforce.

Source: Cox, T. H., & Blake, S. (1991, August). Managing cultural diversity: Implications for organizational competitiveness. *Academy of Management Executive, 47*, 45–56.

1. Cost Argument	As organizations become more diverse, the cost of a poor job in integrating workers will increase. Those who handle this well will thus create cost advantages over those who don't.
2. Resource-Acquisition Argument	Companies develop reputations on favourability as prospective employers for women and ethnic minorities. Those with the best reputations for managing diversity will win the competition for the best personnel. As the labour pool shrinks and changes composition, this edge will become increasingly important.
3. Marketing Argument	For multinational organizations, the insight and cultural sensitivity that members with roots in other countries bring to the marketing effort should improve these efforts in important ways. The same rationale applies to marketing to subpopulations within domestic operations.
4. Creativity Argument	Diversity of perspectives and less emphasis on conformity to norms of the past (which characterize the modern approach to management of diversity) should improve the level of creativity.
5. Problem-Solving Argument	Heterogeneity in decision and problem solving groups potentially produces better decisions through a wider range of perspectives and more thorough critical analysis of issues.
6. System Flexibility Argument	An implication of the multicultural model for managing diversity is that the system will become less determinant, less standardized, and therefore more fluid. The increased fluidity should create greater flexibility to react to environmental changes (i.e., reactions should be faster and at less cost).

Personal experience is unnecessary for such stereotype formation. In one study, people were asked to describe the traits of a number of ethnic groups, including several fictional ones. Although they had never met a Danerian, a Pirenian, or a Wallonian, this did not inhibit them from assigning traits, and those they assigned were usually unfavourable![24] Such stereotypes often contain contradictory elements. A common reaction is to describe a particular group as being too lazy, while at the same time criticizing it for taking one's job opportunities away.



The Urban Institute
www.urban.org

There is a remarkable shortage of serious research into racial and ethnic matters in organizations.[25] Nevertheless, what follows is a sample of some typical findings. Just getting in the door can be a problem. For example:

> The Urban Institute sent out teams of black and white job applicants with equal credentials. The men applied for the same entry-level jobs in Chicago and Washington, D.C., within hours of each other. They were the same age and physical size, had identical education and work experience, and shared similar personalities. Yet in almost 20% of the 476 audits, whites advanced farther in the hiring process, researchers found.[26]

Even after getting in the door, career tracking based on racial or ethnic stereotypes is common. For instance, one study found that a stereotype that "African Americans can't handle pressure" was partially responsible for a lack of acceptance of African Americans in managerial roles.[27] Many companies have promoted African American executives to positions having to do with affirmative action, diversity, or urban affairs in spite of their extensive credentials in other substantive areas of business. Similarly, the stereotype of Asian Americans as technical wizards has interfered with their opportunity to ascend to high general management positions.[28]

Attributions can play an important role in determining how job performance is interpreted. For example, one study found that good performance on the part of African American managers was seen to be due to help from others (a situational attribution), while good performance by Caucasian managers was seen to be due to their effort and abilities (a dispositional attribution).[29]

Finally, racial and ethnic stereotypes are also important in the context of the increasing globalization of business. In one study, researchers asked American business students to describe Japanese and American managers along a number of dimensions. The students viewed Japanese managers as having more productive employees and being better overall managers. However, the students preferred to work for an American manager.[30] One can wonder how such students will respond to international assignments. Of course, all groups have stereotypes of each other. Japanese stereotypes of Americans probably contribute to Americans not being promoted above a certain level in Japanese firms.

Gender Stereotypes. One of the most problematic stereotypes for organizations is the gender stereotype. Considering their numbers in the workforce, women are severely underrepresented in managerial and administrative jobs. Although women now occupy a significant and growing proportion of entry- and mid-level management positions, this is not the case for top-level positions, as women currently occupy less than 7 percent of executive positions.[31] There is evidence that gender stereotypes are partially responsible for discouraging women from business careers and blocking their ascent to managerial positions. This underrepresentation of women managers and administrators happens because stereotypes of women do not correspond especially well with stereotypes of businesspeople or managers. As indicated in the chapter opening vignette, a major barrier to women's advancement to managerial positions in the Bank of Montreal was myths about the company's female employees. These myths have their basis in gender stereotypes.

What is the nature of gender stereotypes? A series of studies has had managers describe men in general, women in general, and typical "successful middle managers." These studies have determined that successful middle managers are perceived as having traits and attitudes that are similar to those generally ascribed to men, that is, successful managers are seen as more similar to men in qualities such as leadership ability, competitiveness, self-confidence, ambitiousness, and objectivity.[32] Thus, stereotypes of successful middle managers do not correspond to stereotypes of women. The trend over time in the results of these studies contains some bad news and some good news. The bad news is that *male* managers today hold the same dysfunctional stereotypes about women and management that they held in the early 1970s when researchers conducted the first of these studies. At that time, women managers held the same stereotypes as the men. The good news is that the recent research shows a shift by the women—they now see successful middle managers as possessing attitudes and characteristics that describe *both* men and women in general. However, although good managers are described today as possessing less masculine characteristics than in past decades, the most recent research indicates that both men and women of varying age, education, and work experience still describe a good manager as possessing predominantly masculine characteristics.[33]

Granting that gender stereotypes exist, do they lead to biased human resource decisions? The answer would appear to be yes. In a typical study, researchers asked male bank supervisors to make hypothetical decisions about workers who were described equivalently except for gender.[34] Women were discriminated against for promotion to a branch manager's position. They were also discriminated against when they requested to attend a professional development conference. In addition, female supervisors were less likely than their male counterparts to receive support for their request that a problem employee be fired. In one case, bias worked to *favour* women. The bank supervisors were more likely to approve a request for a leave of absence to care for one's children when it came from a female. This finding

Exhibit 3.6
Percentages of women in senior level positions in Canadian organizations.

Sources: Women still find slow rise to power positions. *The Globe and Mail*, pp. B1, B7; Johne, M. (2002, June 14). Dynamic soul inspires program. *The Globe and Mail*, C1; McFarland, J. (2003, March 13)., Reprinted with permission from *The Globe and Mail* and Marja Johne, a Toronto-based freelance writer.

The number of women who hold senior level corporate positions in Canada is on the rise although progress has been slow and they still have a long way to go before there are representative numbers of women at the most senior levels.

- Women account for 14 percent (752) of the 5,361 top corporate officer positions in Canada up from 12 percent in 1999.
- In 2003, 62.2 percent of companies had at least one woman corporate office up from 56.4 percent in 1999.
- In Canada, 33.3 percent of companies have more than one woman corporate officer compared to 66.6 percent in the United States.
- At the highest levels of leadership, women hold 6.7 percent of the highest titles of president, CEO, chief operating officer, chairwoman, vice-chairwoman, executive vice-president, and senior executive vice-president compared to 3.4 percent in 1999.
- Of the top 500 largest businesses in Canada, only 13 are led by women:

Name	Title	Company
Belinda Stronach	CEO & President	Magna International
Louise Wending	SVP & General Manager	Costco Wholesale Canada
Nancy Southern	Co-CEO & Co-Chair	ATCO
Irene Rosenfeld	President & Group VP.	Kraft Canada
Kathy Bardswick	CEO & President	Co-Operators Gen. Ins.
Kathy Bardswick	CEO & President	Co-Operators Life Ins.
Linda Hasenfratz	CEO & President	Linamar
Heather Reisman	CEO & Chair	Indigo Books & Music
Michelle Carinici	CEO & President	Atlantic Lottery
Beth Horowitz	President & General Manager	Amex Bank of Canada
Catherine Hughes	President	Schlumberger Canada
Barb Leavitt	President	Baxter
Janice Tomlinson	Chair	Chubb Ins. Co. of Canada

is similar to others that show that gender stereotypes tend to favour women when they are being considered for "women's" jobs (such as secretary) or for "women's" tasks (such as supervising other women).[35] However, as shown in Exhibit 3.6, women continue to be underrepresented in senior level positions in Canadian organizations.

In general, research suggests that the above findings are fairly typical. Women suffer from a stereotype that is detrimental to their hiring, development, promotion, and salaries. Women managers are also more likely than men managers to have to make off-the-job sacrifices and compromises in family life to maintain their careers.[36] However, there is growing evidence that the detrimental effects of such stereotypes are reduced or removed when decision makers have good information about the qualifications and performance of particular women and an accurate picture of the job that they are applying for or seeking promotion into.[37] In particular, several field studies reveal convincingly that women do not generally suffer from gender stereotypes in *performance evaluations* that their supervisors provide.[38] This is not altogether surprising. As we noted earlier, stereotypes help us process information in ambiguous situations. To the extent that we have good information on which to base our perceptions of people, reliance on stereotypes is less necessary. Day-to-day performance is often fairly easy to observe, and gender stereotypes do not intrude on evaluations. On the other hand, hiring and promotion decisions might confront managers with ambiguous targets or situations and prompt them to resort to gender stereotypes in forming impressions. Furthermore, when women

make up a very *small* proportion of an employee group (15–20 percent) they tend to suffer a "tokenism" effect that exaggerates the effect of stereotypes.[39] Under such circumstances, research shows that women's performance appraisals suffer.[40] Evidently people view token women as less capable of doing a "man's" job.

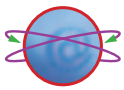
Age Stereotypes. Another kind of stereotype that presents problems for organizations is the age stereotype. Knowing that a person falls into a certain age range, we have a tendency to make certain assumptions about the person's physical, psychological, and intellectual capabilities.

What is the nature of work-related age stereotypes? Older workers are seen as having less *capacity for performance*. They tend to be viewed as less productive, creative, logical, and capable of performing under pressure than younger workers. In addition, older workers are seen as having less *potential for development*. Compared with younger workers, they are considered more rigid and dogmatic and less adaptable to new corporate cultures. Not all stereotypes of older workers are negative, however. They tend to be perceived as more honest, dependable, and trustworthy (in short, more *stable*). In general, these stereotypes are held by both younger and older individuals.[41] It is worth noting that these stereotypes are essentially inaccurate. For example, age seldom limits the capacity for development until postemployment years.[42] Also, research shows that age and performance are unrelated, and some recent studies are beginning to show a shift towards a more positive perception about older workers.[43]

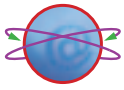
However, the relevant question remains: Do age stereotypes affect human resource decisions? It would appear that such stereotypes can affect decisions regarding hiring, promotion, and skills development. In one study, researchers had university students make hypothetical recommendations regarding younger and older male workers. An older man was less likely to be hired for a finance job that required rapid, high-risk decisions. An older man was considered less promotable for a marketing position that required creative solutions to difficult problems. Finally, an older worker was less likely to be permitted to attend a conference on advanced production systems.[44] These decisions reflect the stereotypes of the older worker depicted above, and they are doubtless indicative of the tendency for older employees to be laid off during corporate restructuring.



A public awareness campaign to combat age stereotypes and discrimination sponsored by Canada's Association for the Fifty-Plus and the Ontario Human Rights Commission featured this poster with the tag line: "Nobody has a shelf life."



Ontario Human Rights Commission www.ohrc.on.ca



Canada's Association for the Fifty-Plus www.50plus.com

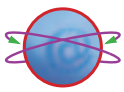
Unfortunately, the reality for older workers is consistent with the research. According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission, discrimination on the basis of age is experienced by people as young as 40 to 45, who are often passed over for merit pay and promotions or pressured to take early retirement. In a blatant example of such discrimination, a recent job fair held in Toronto stated that the target audience was 18- to 54-year-olds. Many older workers were offended, and a complaint was made to the Ontario Human Rights Commission.[45] Again, however, we should recognize that age stereotypes may have less impact on human resource decisions when managers have good information about the capacities of the particular employee in question.

To combat age stereotypes and discrimination, Canada's Association for the Fifty-Plus has worked with the Ontario Human Rights Commission on a public awareness campaign that includes a poster featuring photographs of older people with the tag line, "Nobody has a shelf life. Stop age discrimination now."[46]

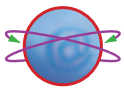
Managing Diversity with Stereotype Reduction

Given the prevalence of the stereotypes noted above, valuing diversity is not something that occurs automatically. Rather, diversity needs to be *managed* to have a positive impact on work behaviour. Management can use a number of strategies to help reduce the effects of workplace stereotypes and to manage diversity.[47]

- Select enough minority members to get them beyond token status. When this happens, the majority starts to look at individual accomplishments, rather than group membership, because they can see variation in the behaviour of the minority.
- Encourage teamwork that brings minority and majority members together.
- Ensure that those making career decisions about employees have accurate information about them rather than having to rely on hearsay and second-hand opinion.
- Train people to be aware of stereotypes.



Hewlett-Packard www.hewlettpackard.com



BC Hydro www.bchydro.com

Training is the most widely used tool for instituting the management of diversity. Most training begins by illustrating the value of diversity and increasing the awareness of stereotypes. Among the many companies that have made extensive use of such training are McDonnell Douglas, Hewlett-Packard, and BC Hydro. McDonnell Douglas has a program ("Woman-Wise and Business Savvy") focusing on gender differences in work-related behaviours. It uses same-gender group meetings and mixed-gender role plays. At its manufacturing plant in San Diego, Hewlett-Packard conducted training on cultural differences between Anglo-Americans and Mexican, Indochinese, and Filipinos. Much of the content focused on cultural differences in communication styles.[48]

BC Hydro has an Aboriginal Cross-Cultural Awareness Program that focuses on building relationships. BC Hydro's transmission lines cross more than 500 aboriginal reserves, so employees need to be aware of aboriginal rights, customs, and laws protecting aboriginal lands. Employees learn how diversity can affect their work in a particular community. Aboriginals serve as subject-matter experts for the training program, which includes face-to-face meetings. Training takes place in a traditional setting within a particular community and has included dancing and singing.[49]

Asset recognition training is one form of training that goes beyond group differences and emphasizes individual uniqueness.[50] In this training, people record on worksheets their own personal knowledge, insights, and experiences. Then, in small groups, each person's unique assets and potential contributions to his or her work group and the organization are identified. Focusing on the individual and going beyond his or her current work role expertise fosters appreciation for diversity. Notice how this training counteracts the perceptual narrowing that we described in Bruner's model.

There is as yet little hard research on the success of diversity training programs. However, there is some anecdotal evidence that these programs can actually cause disruption and bad feelings when all they do is get people to open up and generate stereotypes and then send them back to work.[51] Awareness training should be accompanied by skills training that is relevant to the particular needs of the organization. This might include training in resolving intercultural conflict, team building, handling a charge of sexual harassment, or learning a second language. Hewlett-Packard is a company that soon realized that awareness training was not enough. Such training now constitutes only one of nine diversity training modules of this type.[52]

Basic awareness and skills training are not the only components of managing diversity. Organizations must use a number of other tactics. In future chapters, we will consider the following:

- Comprehensive attitude change programs that focus on diversity (Chapter 4).
- Recognizing diversity in employee needs and motives (Chapter 5).
- Using alternative working schedules to offer employees flexibility (Chapter 6).
- Using employee surveys to foster better communication (Chapters 10 and 16).

To find out how one company has implemented a successful diversity management program, see "Applied Focus: *Managing Diversity at the North West Company.*"

To overcome stereotypes and achieve a diverse workforce, we have to select people on the basis of their talents and appraise their performance fairly. These activities are also important because they can influence employees' perceptions of trust and organizational support. Let us now look at the role of perception in these areas.

Perceptions of Trust and Organizational Support

Do you trust your boss? This is a question that more and more people are asking themselves today. In the last several years, the importance of trust in organizations has become especially evident in the face of the Enron and WordCom scandals. Not surprisingly, employee trust toward management is reported to be on the decline.[53] One survey found that 47 percent of those who responded agreed that a lack of trust is a problem in their organization. In another survey, 40 percent indicated that they do not believe what management says.[54] A decline in trust can be a serious problem because trust perceptions influence organizational processes and outcomes, such as sales levels, net profits, and employee turnover.[55]

While most of us have some basic understanding of what trust means, most definitions of **trust** refer to it as a willingness to be vulnerable and to take risks with respect to the actions of another party.[56] More specifically, "trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another."[57] Trust perceptions toward management are based on three distinct perceptions: ability, benevolence, and integrity.[58] Ability refers to employee perceptions regarding managements' competence and skills. Benevolence refers to the extent that employees perceive management as caring and concerned for their interests and willing to do good for them. Integrity refers to employee perceptions that management adheres to and behaves according to a set of values and principles that the trustor finds acceptable. The combination of these three factors influences perceptions of trust.

Trust. A psychological state in which one has a willingness to be vulnerable and to take risks with respect to the actions of another party.

Keeping in mind that trust refers to a willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of others, how trusting would you be if you perceived your boss to be incompetent, unconcerned about your welfare, and/or driven by a set of values that you find unacceptable? Not surprisingly, higher perceptions of management ability, benevolence, and integrity are associated with greater perceptions of trust.

APPLIED FOCUS

Managing Diversity at the North West Company

The North West Company is the main provider of food and everyday products and services to remote communities across northern Canada and Alaska. The company's markets are physically isolated but among the fastest-growing in North America, and 80 percent of the customers are of aboriginal origin.

The company has been promoting and implementing diversity management for more than 10 years, placing emphasis on encouraging higher levels of aboriginal representation and involvement at all levels in the company. Today, the North West Company is the largest employer of aboriginal people in Canada outside of the Federal Government and is the largest private-sector employer of aboriginal people in North America, including almost 25 percent in management positions.

During the last decade, the company has set aggressive targets for hiring aboriginal people and moving them into management positions. The key to the company's success in managing diversity can be found in six building blocks that align the business with the needs of the market and that ensure that the company's goals for diversity are achieved.

For example, the People First program is designed to help the company achieve its targets for aboriginal participation. The first priority was to ensure that everyone in the company understood the importance of aboriginal participation. An important component of the program is a cross-cultural orientation seminar to provide the head staff with insight into the history, social context, and unique lifestyle of aboriginal people. The values of the company are also linked to aboriginal symbolism and spiritual values to help create a deeper connection between the business and the well-being of the aboriginal community.

Another building block is a store-based training program for management and staff that portrays the culture and conditions in Northern communities. In addition to improving employee job satisfaction, retention, and productivity through skills development, the programs are also designed to increase the career potential for aboriginal employees by preparing them for management positions.

Several of the building blocks involve aboriginal involvement at the highest levels of the company. For example, two members of the board are aboriginals who have experience in business, government, and public policy. These members are instrumental in helping the company develop recruitment, training, and compensation programs tailored to aboriginal people. In addition, the company also has a National Aboriginal Business Relations Council of seven aboriginal leaders from different regions of Canada. The council meets regularly with senior management to provide insights into regional issues and opportunities. As well, one of the seven vice-presidents of the company is aboriginal and the company hopes to have more aboriginal participation at this level in the future.

Finally, as more aboriginal employees have become employed at The North West Company and have moved into management positions, the company has become an attractive place for aboriginal people to work and to pursue management opportunities. Therefore, the company now features success stories of aboriginal managers in their national recruiting programs.

Sources: Excerpted from Kennedy, E. (1999, September/October). The North West Company: Making diversity work. *Ivey Business Journal, 64*, 12–14; www.northwest.ca.

Perceived organizational support. Employees' general belief that their organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being.

Whether or not you trust your boss and management probably has a lot to do with how much they support you, or rather your perceptions of their support. **Perceived organizational support** (POS) refers to employees' general belief that their organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being. When employees have positive perceptions of organizational support, they believe that their organization will provide assistance when it is needed for them to perform their job effectively and to deal with stressful situations.[59]

There are a number of factors that contribute to employees' POS. First, because supervisors function as representatives of their organizations through their actions and decisions, they represent the organization to employees. As a result, favourable treatment and support from supervisors contributes strongly to POS. In addition, fair organizational procedures as well as favourable rewards and job conditions are also strongly related to POS.

According to organizational support theory, employees who have strong perceptions of organizational support feel an obligation to care about the organization's

welfare and to help the organization achieve its objectives. They feel a greater sense of purpose and meaning and a strong sense of belonging to the organization. As a result, employees' incorporate their membership and role within the organization into their social identity.

In addition, when POS is strong, employees feel obligated to reciprocate the organization's care and support. As a result, POS has a number of positive consequences for employees and organizations. Research has found that employees who have greater POS have higher job performance and are more satisfied with their jobs, more committed to the organization, and less likely to be absent from work and to quit. They are also more likely to have a positive mood at work and to be more involved in their job, and less likely to experience strain symptoms such as fatigue, burnout, anxiety, and headaches.[60] Exhibit 3.7 shows the major predictors and consequences of perceived organizational support.

What can organizations do to develop employee perceptions of organizational support? One study found that supportive human resource practices that demonstrate an investment in employees and recognition of employee contributions are most likely to lead to the development of greater POS. Such practices signal to employees that the organization values and cares about them. Some examples of supportive human resource practices include participation in decision making, opportunities for growth and development, and a fair reward and recognition system.[61] Of course, equality and diversity programs such as those at the Bank of Montreal are also good examples of how an organization invests in its employees and develops POS.

Person Perception in the Selection Interview

You have probably had the pleasure (or displeasure!) of sitting through one or more job interviews in your life. After all, the interview is one of the most common organizational selection devices, applied with equal opportunity to applicants for everything from the janitorial staff to the executive suite. With our futures on the line, we would like to think that the interview is a fair and accurate selection device, but is it? Research shows that the interview is a valid selection device, although it is far

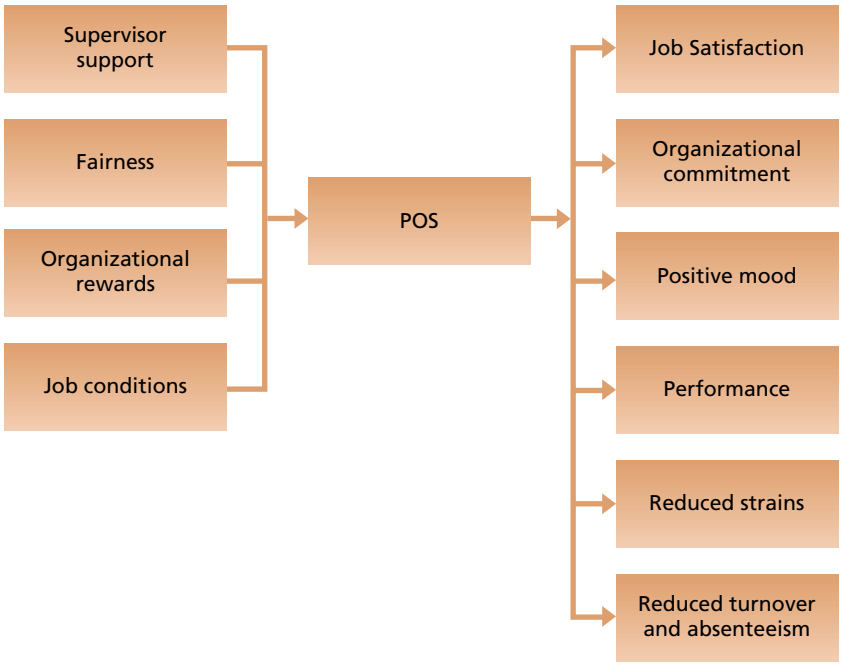
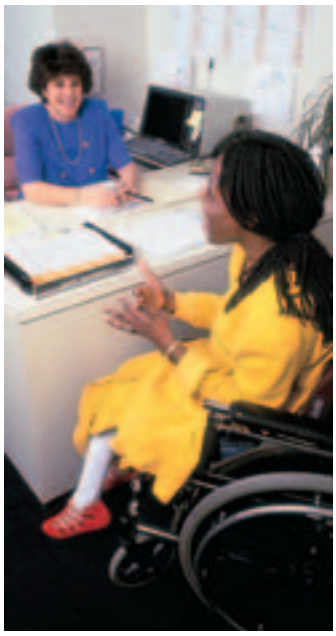


Exhibit 3.7
Predictors and consequences of perceived organizational support.

Source: Based on Rhoades, L., & Eisenberger, R. (2002). Perceived organizational support: A review of the literature. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 87,* 698–714.

The interview is a difficult setting in which to form accurate impressions about a candidate. Interview validity increases when interviews are more structured and interviewers ask a set of predetermined questions.



Contrast effects. Previously interviewed job applicants affect an interviewer's perception of a current applicant, leading to an exaggeration of differences between applicants.

from perfectly accurate, especially when the interviewer conducts it in an unstructured, free-form format. Validity improves whenever interviewers use a guide to order and organize their questions and impressions.[62]

What factors threaten the validity of the interview? To consider the most obvious problem first, applicants are usually motivated to present an especially favourable impression of themselves. As our discussion of the perception of people implies, it is difficult enough to gain a clear picture of another individual without having to cope with active deception! A couple of the perceptual tendencies that we already discussed in this chapter can also operate in the interview. For one thing, there is evidence that interviewers compare applicants with a stereotype of the ideal applicant.[63] In and of itself, this is not a bad thing. However, this ideal stereotype must be accurate, and this requires a clear understanding of the nature of the job in question and the kind of person who can do well in this job. This is a tall order, especially for the interviewer who is hiring applicants for a wide variety of jobs. Second, interviewers have a tendency to exhibit primacy reactions.[64] Minimally, this means that information the interviewer acquired early in the interview will have an undue impact on the final decision. However, it also means that information the interviewer obtained *before* the interview (for instance, by scanning an application form or resumé) can have an exaggerated influence on the interview outcome.

A couple of perceptual tendencies that we have not discussed are also at work in interviews. First, interviewers have a tendency to underweight positive information about the applicant.[65] This tendency means that negative information has undue impact on the decision.[66] It might occur because interviewers get more feedback about unsuccessful hiring than successful hiring ("Why did you send me that idiot?"). It might also happen because positive information is not perceived as telling the interviewer much, since the candidate is motivated to put up a good front. In addition, **contrast effects** sometimes occur in the interview.[67] This means that the applicants who have been interviewed earlier affect the interviewer's perception of a current applicant, leading to an exaggeration of differences between applicants. For example, if the interviewer has seen two excellent candidates and then encounters an average candidate, she might rate this person lower than if he had been preceded by two average applicants (see Exhibit 3.8). This is an example of the impact of the situation on perception.

It is clear that the interview constitutes a fairly difficult setting in which to form accurate impressions about others. It is of short duration, a lot of information is generated, and the applicant is motivated to present a favourable image. Thus, interviewers often adopt "perceptual crutches" that hinder accurate perception. Earlier, we noted that unstructured interviews are less valid than structured interviews where the interviewer scores the applicant's responses to a predetermined series of questions. This form of interview probably reduces information overload and ensures that applicants can be more easily compared, since they have all responded to an identical sequence of questions.[68]

Person Perception and Performance Appraisal

Once a person is hired, however imperfectly, further perceptual tasks confront organization members. Specifically, the organization will want some index of the person's job performance for decisions regarding pay raises, promotions, transfers, and training needs.

Objective and Subjective Measures

It is possible to find objective measures of performance for certain aspects of some jobs. These are measures that do not involve a substantial degree of human judgment. The number of publications that a professor has in top journals is a good

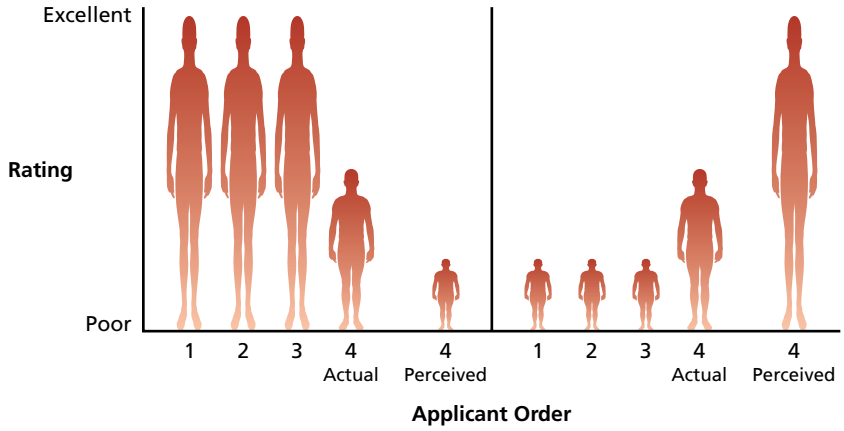


Exhibit 3.8
Two examples of contrast effects.

example. In general, though, as we move up the organizational hierarchy, it becomes more difficult to find objective indicators of performance. Thus, it is often hard to find quantifiable evidence of a manager's success or failure. When objective indicators of performance do exist, they are often contaminated by situational factors. For example, it might be very difficult to compare the dollar sales of a snowmobile salesperson whose territory covers British Columbia with one whose territory is Nova Scotia. Also, while dollar sales might be a good indicator of current sales performance, it says little about a person's capacity for promotion to district sales manager.

Because of the difficulties that objective performance indicators present, organizations must often rely on subjective measures of effectiveness, usually provided by managers. However, the manager is confronted by a number of perceptual roadblocks. He or she might not be in a position to observe many instances of effective and ineffective performance. This is especially likely when the employee's job activities cannot be monitored directly. For example, a police sergeant cannot ride around in six squad cars at the same time, and a telephone company supervisor cannot visit customers' homes or climb telephone poles with all his or her installers. Such situations mean that the target (the employee's performance) is frequently ambiguous, and we have seen that the perceptual system resolves ambiguities in an efficient but often inaccurate manner. Even when performance is observable, employees often alter their behaviour so that they look good when their manager is around.

Rater Errors

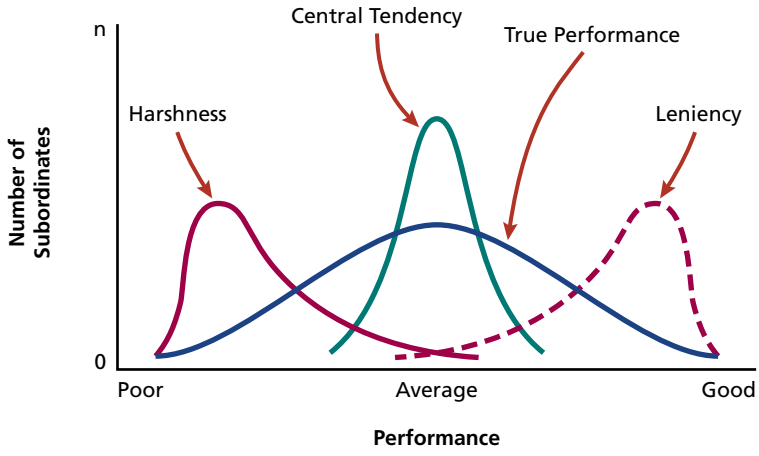
Subjective performance appraisal is susceptible to some of the perceptual biases we discussed earlier—primacy, recency, and stereotypes. In addition, a number of other perceptual tendencies occur in performance evaluation. They are often called rater errors. One interrelated set of these tendencies includes leniency, harshness, and central tendency (Exhibit 3.9). **Leniency** refers to the tendency to perceive the performance of one's ratees as especially good, while **harshness** is the tendency to see their performance as especially ineffective. Lenient raters tend to give "good" ratings, and harsh raters tend to give "bad" ratings. Professors with reputations as easy graders or tough graders exemplify these types of raters. **Central tendency** involves assigning most ratees to a middle-range performance category—the extremes of the rating categories are not used. The professor who assigns 80 percent of her students C's is committing this error. Each of these three rating tendencies is probably partially a function of the rater's personal experiences. For example, the manager who has had an especially good group of employees might respond with special harshness when management transfers him to supervise a group of slightly less able workers. It is worth noting that not all instances of leniency, harshness, and central tendency necessarily represent perceptual errors. In some cases, raters intentionally commit these

Leniency. The tendency to perceive the job performance of ratees as especially good.

Harshness. The tendency to perceive the job performance of ratees as especially ineffective.

Central tendency. The tendency to assign most ratees to middle-range job performance categories.

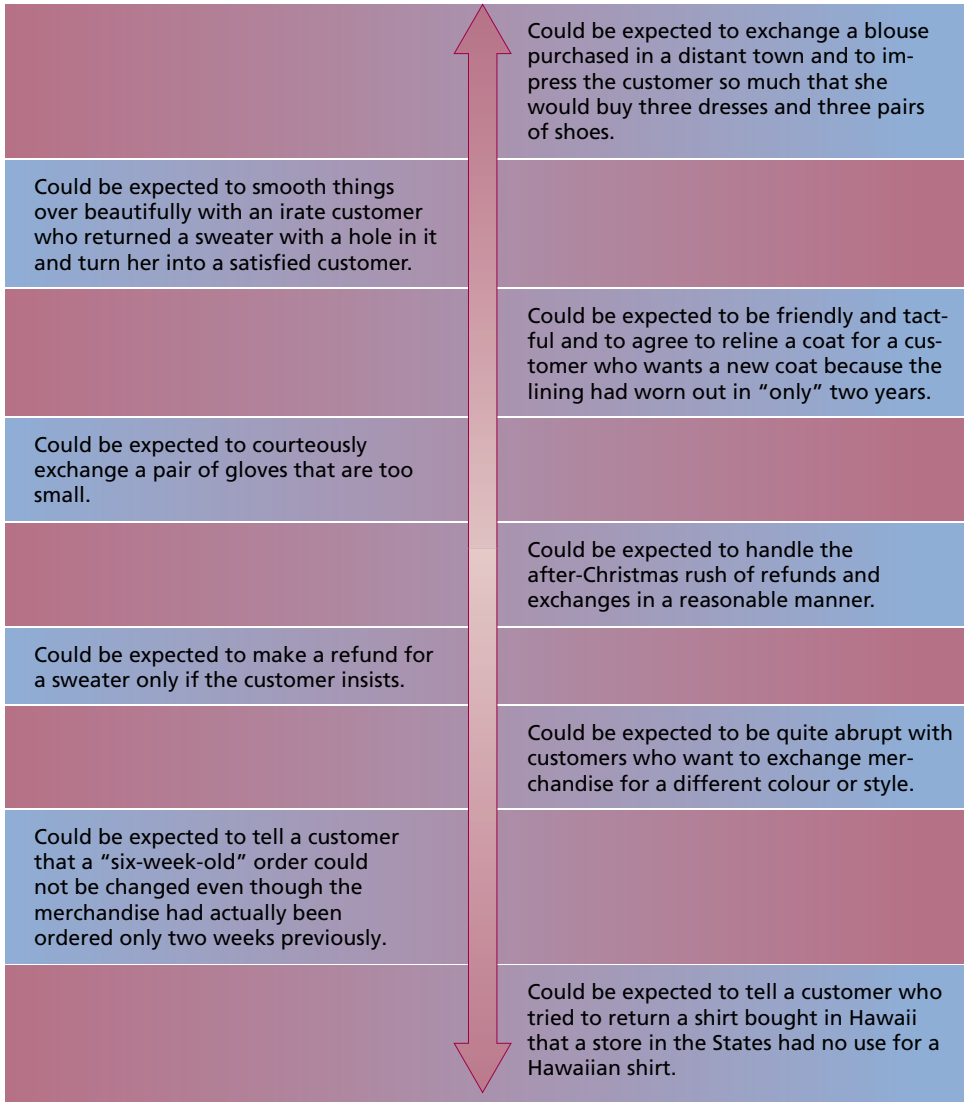
Exhibit 3.9
Leniency, harshness, and central tendency rater errors.



errors, even though they have accurate perceptions of workers' performance. For example, a manager might use leniency or central tendency in performance reviews so that his employees do not react negatively to his evaluation.

Exhibit 3.10
Behaviourally anchored scale for rating customer service.

Source: Campbell, J. P., Dunnette, M. D., Lawler, E. E., III, & Weick, K. E., Jr. (1970). *Managerial behavior, performance, and effectiveness*. New York: McGraw-Hill.





Another perceptual error that is frequently committed by performance raters is called the **halo effect**.[69] The halo effect occurs when the observer allows the rating of an individual on one trait or characteristic to colour the ratings on other traits or characteristics. For example, in a teacher evaluation system, a student might perceive his instructor as a nice person, and this might favourably influence his perception of the instructor's knowledge of the material and speed in returning exams and papers. Similarly, a manager might rate an employee as frequently late for work, and this might in turn lead her to devalue the employee's productivity and quality of work. As these examples illustrate, halo can work either for or against the ratee. In both cases, the rater fails to perceive differences *within* ratees. The halo effect tends to be organized around central traits that the rater considers important. The student feels that being nice is an especially important quality, while the manager places special emphasis on promptness. Ratings on these characteristics then affect the rater's perceptions of other characteristics.

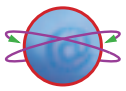
Halo effect. The rating of an individual on one trait or characteristic tends to colour ratings on other traits or characteristics.

The **similar-to-me effect** is an additional rater error that may, in part, reflect perceptual bias. The rater tends to give more favourable evaluations to people who are similar to the rater in terms of background or attitudes. For example, the manager

Similar-to-me effect. A rater gives more favourable evaluations to people who are similar to the rater in terms of background or attitudes.

with an M.B.A. degree who comes from an upper-middle-class family might perceive a similar employee as a good performer even though the person is only average. Similarly, a rater might overestimate the performance of an individual who holds similar religious and political views. Such reactions probably stem from a tendency to view our own performance, attitudes, and background as "good." We then tend to generalize this evaluation to others who are, to some degree, similar to us. Raters with diverse employees should be especially wary of this error.

Given all these problems, it should be clear that it is difficult to obtain good subjective evaluations of employee performance. Because of this, human resource specialists have explored various techniques for reducing perceptual errors and biases. There has been a tendency to attempt to reduce rater errors by using rating scales with more specific behavioural labels. The assumption here is that giving specific examples of effective and ineffective performance will facilitate the rater's perceptual processes and recall.



J.C. Penney Co.
www.jcpenney.net

Exhibit 3.10 shows a behaviourally anchored rating scale that gives very specific behavioural examples (from top to bottom) of good, average, and poor customer service. It was developed for the J.C. Penney Company. With such an aid, the rater might be less likely to be susceptible to perceptual errors when completing the rating task, although the evidence for this is mixed.[70] Furthermore, there is also some evidence that a performance appraisal system that accurately measures employees' performance and ties it to rewards can increase employees' perceptions of trust toward management.[71]

Learning Objectives Checklist

1. *Perception* involves interpreting the input from our senses to provide meaning to our environment, and any instance of perception involves a perceiver, a target, and a situational context. The experience, needs, and emotions of the perceiver affect perception, as does the ambiguity of the target.

2. Bruner's model of the perceptual process suggests that we are very receptive to cues provided by the target and the situation when we encounter an unfamiliar target. However, as we discover familiar cues, we quickly categorize the target and process other cues in a selective manner to maintain a consistent and constant picture of the target. When the target is a person, this drive for constancy and consistency is revealed in a number of specific perceptual biases, including *primacy, recency, implicit personality theory, reliance on central traits, projection,* and *stereotyping*. Gender, age, race, and ethnic stereotypes are especially problematic for organizations.

3. *Attribution* is the process of assigning causes or motives to people's behaviour. The observer is often interested in determining whether the behaviour is due to dispositional (internal) or situational (external) causes. Behaviour is likely to be attributed to the disposition of the actor when the behaviour (1) is performed consistently, (2) differs from that exhibited by other people, and (3) occurs in a variety of situations or environments. An opposite set of cues will prompt a situational attribution.

4. The tendency of observers to overemphasize dispositional attributions is known as the *fundamental attribution error.* In contrast, actors are more likely to explain their own behaviour in situational terms and this actor–observer difference in attributions is known as the *actor–observer effect.* Our tendency to take credit for success and to deny responsibility for failure is know as the *self-serving bias.*

5. The changing nature of the workplace and increasing diversity has highlighted the importance of valuing and managing employee diversity, which can yield strategic and competitive advantages.

6. Racial, ethnic, gender, and age stereotypes can result in discriminatory human resource decisions and are a major barrier to valuing diversity. Organizations

can use a number of tactics, including training, to combat stereotypes and to manage diversity.

7. Perceptions of *trust* involve a willingness to be vulnerable and to take risks with respect to the actions of another party. Trust perceptions toward management are based on perceptions of ability, benevolence, and integrity. *Perceived organizational support* refers to perceptions about how much an organization values an individual's contribution and cares about his/her well-being. Perceptions of trust and organizational support influence employees' attitudes and behaviour.

8. Judging the suitability of job applicants in an interview and appraising job performance are especially difficult perceptual tasks, in part because the target is motivated to convey a good impression. In addition, interviewers and performance raters exhibit a number of perceptual tendencies that are reflected in inaccurate judgments, including *contrast effects, leniency, harshness, central tendency, halo,* and *similar-to-me effects*. Structured interviews can improve the accuracy of perceptions in the employment interview, and behaviourally anchored rating scales can improve performance appraisals.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss how differences in the experiences of students and professors might affect their perceptions of students' written work and class comments.
2. Using implicit personality theory, explain how physical attractiveness influences job-related outcomes in employment interviews and performance appraisals.
3. Discuss the occupational stereotypes that you hold of computer programmers, the clergy, truck drivers, bartenders, and bankers. How do you think these stereotypes have developed? Has an occupational stereotype ever caused you to commit a socially embarrassing error when meeting someone for the first time?
4. Use Bruner's perceptual model (Exhibit 3.3) to explain why performance appraisals and interviewers' judgments are frequently inaccurate.
5. Discuss how perceptions of organizational support can influence employees' attitudes and behaviour. What can organizations do to develop positive perceptions of organizational support?
6. Suppose an employee does a particularly poor job on an assigned project. Discuss the attribution process that this person's manager will use to form judgments about this poor performance. Be sure to discuss how the manager will use consistency, consensus, and distinctiveness cues.
7. A study of small business failures found that owners generally cited factors such as economic depression or strong competition as causes. However, creditors of these failed businesses were much more likely to cite ineffective management. What attribution bias is indicated by these findings? Why do you think the difference in attribution occurs?
8. Discuss the factors that make it difficult for employment interviewers to form accurate perceptions of interviewees. Explain why a gender or racial stereotype might be more likely to affect a hiring decision than a performance appraisal decision.
9. Describe some of the things that an organization can do to remove the barriers to workplace diversity. List some of the advantages gained by organizations that effectively manage a diverse workforce.

Integrative Discussion Questions

1. Describe how the principles of operant and social learning theory can be used to manage workplace diversity and reduce the effects of workplace stereotypes. How can the organizational learning practices described in Chapter 2 be used for managing diversity and stereotype reduction?
2. Consider how the four basic types of managerial activities described in Chapter 1 (i.e., routine communication, traditional management, networking, and human resource management) can influence employees' perceptions of trust and organizational support. How should managers perform each of these activities in order to improve employees' perceptions of trust and organizational support?

Experiential Exercise

Beliefs about Older Workers

The following items are an attempt to assess the attitudes people have about older workers. The statements cover many different opposing points of view; you may find yourself agreeing strongly with some of the statements, disagreeing just as strongly with others, and perhaps feeling uncertain about others.

Read each statement carefully. Indicate the response that best tells how you feel about each statement in the space provided. In all cases, older refers to those who are 50 years of age or older.

—1—	—2—	—3—	—4—	—5—
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagre	Disagree	Strongly disagree

____ 1. Older employees have *fewer accidents* on the job.

____ 2. Most companies are *unfair* to older employees.

____ 3. Older employees are *harder to train* for jobs.

____ 4. Older employees are *absent more often* than younger employees.

____ 5. Younger employees have more *serious accidents* than older workers.

____ 6. If two workers had similar skills, I'd *pick the older worker to work with me*.

____ 7. *Occupational diseases* are more likely to occur among younger employees.

____ 8. Older employees usually turn out work of *higher quality*.

____ 9. Older employees are *grouchier* on the job.

____ 10. Younger workers are *more cooperative* on the job.

____ 11. Older workers are more *dependable*.

____ 12. Most older workers cannot keep up with the *speed of modern industry*.

____ 13. Older employees are *most loyal* to the company.

____ 14. Older workers *resist change* and are *too set in their ways*.

____ 15. Younger workers are more interested than older workers in *challenging jobs*.

____ 16. Older workers can *learn new skill*s as easily as other employees.

____ 17. Older employees are *better* employees.

____ 18. Older employees *do not want* jobs with *increased responsibilities*.

____ 19. Older workers are not interested in *learning new skills*.

____ 20. Older employees should '*step aside*' (take a less demanding job) to give younger employees advancement opportunities.

____ 21. The majority of older employees would *quit work* if they could *afford* it.

____ 22. Older workers are usually *outgoing and friendly* at work.

____ 23. Older workers prefer *less challenging jobs* than those they held *when* they were *younger*.

____ 24. It is a *better investment* to *train younger workers* rather than older workers.

____ 25. Older employees in our department *work just as hard* as anyone else.

____ 26. Given a choice, I would not work with an older worker on a daily basis.

____ 27. A person's *performance declines significantly* with age.

Using the numbers from 1 to 5 on the rating scale, mark your personal opinion about each statement in the blank space next to each statement. Remember, give your personal opinion according to how much you agree or disagree with each item.

Scoring and Interpretation

The scale you have just completed measures your attitudes toward older workers. To score your beliefs about older workers, subtract your responses to each of the following items from 6: 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13, 16, 17, 22, and 25. For example, if you put 2 for item 1, give yourself a 4 (6 minus 2). Then simply add up your resulting responses to all 27 items. Your score should fall somewhere between 27 and 135. Low scores indicate an overall negative belief about older workers, while high scores indicate positive beliefs. Thus, the higher your score, the more favourable are your attitudes toward older workers.

Research on older workers has generally found that a negative stereotype of older workers exists in organizations. The danger of this is that it can lead to negative attitudes and discriminatory behaviour toward older workers.

A recent study of 179 employees from three organizations obtained scores that ranged from 54 to 118. The average score was 90, which indicated somewhat positive beliefs about older workers. As reported in other studies, older workers had more positive beliefs about older workers than younger workers. However, younger workers who had more interactions with older workers were found to have more positive beliefs about older workers.

To facilitate discussion, the instructor might have students write their score, age, and how often they come in contact with older workers (daily, several times a week, once a week, or monthly) on pieces of paper. Working in groups and using calculators, the class can compute the class average. On the basis of the distribution of age and contact with older workers in the class, create two age groups (young and older) and two contact with older worker groups (low and high), and calculate the average of these groups. Also, a distribution of the scores might be posted on the board.

Source: Hassell, B. L., & Perrewe, P. L. (1995). An examination of beliefs about older workers: Do stereotypes still exist? *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 16*, 457–468.

Case Incident

Evaluating Gregory

After six months in her new position as manager, Nina was faced with the task of having to conduct performance reviews of her staff. She was worried because she had never done performance reviews and was not sure how to do them. However, in order to ease her way into it, she decided to start with Gregory. Gregory was a recent hire in her department, and Nina felt that he was the most attractive-looking guy she had hired since she became manager. She felt it would be easy to evaluate his performance.

1. Using Bruner's model of the perceptual process, discuss how Nina's perception of Gregory might influence her evaluation of his performance. What are some of the perceptual biases that might come into play?
2. What can Nina do to prevent perceptual errors and bias in her performance evaluations?

Case Study

The Review Session

Jack Adams's mind wandered as he sat outside Bill Squire's office awaiting his yearly performance review …

Well, it's 8:25. Five more minutes to go. Fifteen years with the company, and this new district manager, Squire, couldn't even call and request this meeting personally. These annual performance appraisals are tough enough, and here I've got a bad sales record for the past 12 months. Surely he'll be able to understand that the sales decreases were a result of the new territory assignments. Two major accounts taken away—not to mention all of the smaller ones. It took me years to develop those accounts and now someone else reaps the benefits. I know my capabilities, I work hard. Next thing you know, Squire will probably tell me to stop playing golf with the customers from my old accounts. Who was it that thought this territory reorganization would be an improvement anyway? So what if some of the reps increased their sales records? Come to think of it, I was kind of surprised that the rep over in the eastern counties increased his sales by over 30 percent. Wonder how he did it. Well, no concern of mine. Somehow in the next 60 minutes I'll have to make Squire understand my 18 percent deficit. This is ridiculous. I've met this guy twice …

Meanwhile, inside his office, Bill Squire glanced at his watch, which read 8:30. Doubting that his salesman Adams would be on time, he glanced over the data sheets nervously …

Certainly hope this meeting doesn't take more than half an hour. So much work to do today. I waited years for this promotion—just never knew it would be so much work. Incredible! Sometimes the other sales managers seem so calm. Bet they're faking it. Now I've got these darn performance appraisals to do. Lucky for me I've got these computer printouts. Let's see … who is this guy? Adams, huh? Eighteen percent below quota. Well, he'll have to explain that! Isn't he that tall redheaded guy? I suppose it would be easier if I'd had more chance to meet him. Well, these printouts will have to suffice. Actually, look at this—overall district sales are way up. This Adams is one of four whose sales are down. I'm sure he'll think of something real creative to explain this. Some of these reps just never learn that sales is just a matter of sweat and blood—good old-fashioned work. These printouts always tell the final story …

At 8:40, Bill Squire buzzed his secretary. "Arlene, is Adams … ah, let's see … Jack Adams here yet?"

"Yes, he is, Mr. Squire," replied Arlene from the outside office. "He's been here for some time now."

With some hesitation, Bill Squire asked his secretary to send Jack Adams in.

Squire: [shaking hands] Good morning, Jack. I hope this meeting doesn't interrupt your appointment schedule. I made it early in the morning, figuring your clients don't do business before 10 anyway.

Adams: No Bill, this time is just fine. [Looks around the office.] You've made some changes in here since Mike (Jack Adams's former sales manager) changed jobs.

Squire: Yeah, I prefer things simple. I think it's more in line with the company's new efficiency image. We want the customers to realize we're always on our toes, right?

Adams: [quietly] Sure thing.

At this point, Bill Squire got up from his chair and walked to a table nearby and poured himself a glass of water. Returning to his desk, he picked up the computer printout lying in front of him.

Squire: [clearing his voice] Well, Jack, we better get to it, right? What I've got here is a printout of all sales personnel in my district for the past 12 months. Have you seen any of this information?

Adams: Well, I've seem some of it and …

Squire: [interrupting] Good, then you probably realize we've got a problem here. Over the past year your performance has been 18 percent below the quota that was established for you. You're one of the four reps whose performance is poor. Thirteen other reps beat their quota. Have you had any problems that I'm not aware of?

Jack Adams was now looking out a window beside Bill Squire's desk. His palms were moist and his lips dry. He tried to put his thoughts together, but his mind just seemed to race.

Squire: Jack, did …?

Adams: Yeah, yeah—I heard you. [Folds his arms.] You know, Bill, you're new to this district, and perhaps there is something you need to realize. I've worked for this company for 15 years and I think, if you check the records, I've always been a pretty good sales rep—no, I'd say one of the best. I work hard. I get along great with my customers and …

Squire: Jack, now that you mention it, I had a complaint about you a couple of weeks ago. Kathy Burgess in purchasing at McGabe Company wrote me a letter saying you hadn't been in contact with them for over a month. Andy, who used to have that account, visited them weekly. How can you hope to make the quota if you don't make contact with the customer?

Adams: Andy had that account when the territory was one-third as big and …

Squire: All right, Jack, I realize the territory reassignments have affected reps a little bit …

Adams [excitedly]: A *little* bit …

Squire [raising his hand]: Hold on, hold on—let me finish. As I was saying, the territory reassignments have meant adjusting. But, Jack, that means hard work—you know, good old-fashioned effort. Come on now, Jack, have you been giving it your best shot? Are you sure there isn't something personal going on? Everything okay at home? I'm just trying to be helpful—open up a little bit.

Jack felt a lot of pressure in the back of his neck. His face felt flushed. Open up, he thought to himself, I don't even know this guy. This is what I get after 15 years. He breathed deeply.

Adams: [calmly] Couldn't we try this again. I may have had more trouble than others with the change in territories … [pause] … I guess it's possible. But maybe, just maybe, the reassignment *did* affect me more than some other reps—maybe I didn't get a fair shake … maybe …

Squire: [frustrated] Back to that again, Jack? [Picks up the printout] Let's look at the *facts*. You can't avoid these figures, Jack!

At this point Jack rose from his chair. His knees were trembling as he walked toward Bill Squire's desk. Leaning over the desk, Jack spoke firmly, "I don't give a damn about your figures." He turned and walked out of the office. From outside, Bill heard a door slam. Noticing that his watch read 8:57, Bill sighed. He thought, at least it didn't take over a half hour. Lots of work to do today. (Bill picks up the computer printout.) It'll be nice to talk to these 13 reps. They know what sales and hard work are all about. (He shakes his head.) If only Jack had been able to open up …

Source: This case was prepared by Professor Brendan D. Bannister and Carol A. Pilo, Northeastern University. Copyright © 1984 by Brendan D. Bannister.

1. Describe Jack Adams's perception of Bill Squire, and Bill Squire's perception of Jack Adams. How do they differ from their own self-perceptions?
2. What are some of the reasons for Jack's and Bill's perceptions of each other? Are there any person perception biases that might have influenced their perceptions?
3. Describe Jack's and Bill's attributions regarding Jack's poor sales record. Why are they different, and is there evidence of any attribution biases? Using the three cues of consistency, consensus, and distinctiveness, what is the most likely attribution for Jack's poor sales record?
4. Refer to Bruner's model of the perceptual process to explain Jack's and Bill's perceptions before and after the performance review. Is there anything that either of them could have done to change their perceptions of each other during the review session?
5. Comment on Bill Squire's approach to conducting the performance review and the effect it had on his perceptions of Jack. If he had conducted the performance session differently, would it have changed his perceptions of Jack and the outcome? What should he have done?